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Coordination of the policies and activities of the specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system related to the following theme: the role of the United Nations in promoting development, particularly with respect to access to and transfer of knowledge and technology, especially information and communication technologies, inter alia, through partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including the private sector

Economic and environmental questions: public administration and development

Letter dated 1 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the findings and recommendations of the Third Global Forum: Fostering Democracy and Development through e-Government, held in Naples from 15 to 17 March 2001 (see annex). The Forum was organized by the Government of Italy, with the support of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, under item 12 of the substantive session of 2001 of the Economic and Social Council, under items 4 and 13 (k) of the provisional agenda.

(*Signed*) Sergio Vento
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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** E/2001/100.

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Annex to the letter dated 1 June 2001 from the Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

THIRD GLOBAL FORUM
FOSTERING DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH e-GOVERNMENT
NAPLES, 15-17 MARCH 2001

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the invitation of the Italian government, representatives of 122 countries, including many ministers, the multilateral agencies, the business community and non governmental organisations came together in Naples at the Third Global Forum. The Forum recorded its appreciation of this unprecedented opportunity to debate and explore the potentials of ICT for government in both developed and developing countries and their capacity to foster democracy and development.

More than 900 international experts and practitioners contributed to a wide ranging debate which highlighted the key challenges facing governments in the design and implementation of e-government strategies to meet the expectations and demands of their citizens for more accessible, transparent and accountable government.

The debate centred on the following six themes:

- Governance issues in the on line era
- ICT impact on the organisation of government
- Implementing e-government
- Services to citizens
- Services to business
- Digital divide and international co-operation

The findings and conclusions reached set a challenging agenda for future work.

Main findings

The Forum recognised the power of ICT to **transform the way in which governments work**. This is most evident in the case of the delivery of services and access to information. Many examples were offered of governments creating greater accessibility to services and improving the ways to provide quicker and more certain results. E-government can consistently improve the quality of life for citizens and can create a sharp reduction of costs and time. Such savings could be "invested " in more active forms of citizenship.

In other areas, such as **strengthening decision-making and policy formation**, it was noted that ICT had the potential to integrate data and facts in a more structured and comprehensive form through better knowledge management. Moreover, it was recognised that the quality of data itself will improve through better collection and analysis. ICT would also facilitate information sharing and the involvement of experts as well as broadening the basis on

which governments seek to identify and reconcile conflicting interests and goals. A major benefit of ICT lies in its capacity to involve citizens and civil society in the policy debate through direct interaction.

ICTs bring deep changes in the content of work and administrative organization. They force the reengineering of the administration in a way which meets citizens' needs. Wider information sharing at all levels of government often makes hierarchical relationships unnecessary.

A number of speakers stressed the importance of these potential developments for the strengthening of governance, the framework within which governments bind themselves to act in the interests of their citizens and to promote their well-being. At the core of good governance lie the principles of **accountability and transparency**. It was agreed that **nothing is more powerful in combating corruption than conducting transactions openly** and with public knowledge of the rules and criteria to be applied. This is not only important at the national and regional level but locally also, in relation to the transactions between the citizen and the state, whether the issue of permits, the collection of taxes or the receipt of benefits. Through its ability to spread accurate and comprehensive information, to automate processes and to provide a record of each transaction, ICT can be a powerful tool for good governance.

It was generally recognised that these benefits are not only potentially available to the developed world but are **a key factor in the development process**. Experience has demonstrated the **value of ICT in improving services even for the most disadvantaged communities**. And the ability to communicate quickly can reduce the sense of isolation of remote areas and contribute to their economic development. But for these benefits to be realised, the developing world needs access to technology, lower costs of access and the training to use it effectively. Otherwise the digital divide would lead to an ever-widening gap. This must not be allowed to happen. That is why initiatives such as the dot.force and other parallel activities are of such importance.

The need to reorient policies for international cooperation and development was recognised by many parties. Actions to ensure that the primary needs of survival are met remain paramount, but basic education and ICT development appear to have become the second and third top priority. The latter is reasonably inexpensive to implement, does not consume large quantities of energy and respects the environment. This development should be addressed to enable developing countries to make full use of technological resources and to boost autonomous, self-sustained processes of development and growth.

Although there was a large element of consensus that ICT in government could have widespread and beneficial results, the Forum insisted that **risks to privacy and security must be addressed**. The new technology must be used for the benefit of citizens not against them. Public servants must not only be trained to use ICT effectively, but they must do so in a culture, which respects the rights of citizens within a framework of good governance.

Nevertheless, **advanced technologies and adequate systems engineering are able to offer stronger guarantees in security and privacy**. They can also allow the effective control of

the use made of personal and sensitive data by the citizen. These guarantees are safer and more secure than the traditional ones.

Finally, it was also recognised that the full potential of ICT has yet to be realised even in the more advanced economies. And the implications for new forms of democracy and active citizenship are vast.

Key points

Discussions in plenary sessions and workshops led to the following conclusions:

Delivering better services

- New electronic means of accessing public information and of delivering public services facilitate a *peer-to-peer* relationship between State and citizen and between State and business. In this new relation of "equals", the *client-provider* system is no longer the administration that controls the citizens, but rather the opposite.
- Thus, citizens are not the recipients, but the co-deciders in e-government systems: public services have to be citizen- and customer-oriented.
- ICT projects for citizens and businesses can only work if the end-users are involved in their development. Cooperation and consultation are key tools of participation in this new democratic process.
- Improved accessibility requires well-constructed portals, simple navigation and user-friendly design.
- ICT offers the possibility of tailoring services to individual needs and 24 hours a day/7 days a week response.
- Services need to be redesigned to achieve the full potential of the application of ICT and be offered through the best provider.
- The barriers of geography and social exclusion can be overcome by new technology and enhanced service arrangements.
- There are two sides to the ICT coin: they further enable globalisation and access to the world, but they are nonetheless rooted at the local level and they may contribute to strengthening social bonds and building communities of concern.

Transforming government

- ICT requires investment in people rather than just technology. Effective human resource management to attract new skills and achieve cultural change is an essential component of successful ICT projects.
- E-government will eventually transform the processes and structures of government to create an administration that is less hierarchical and empowers civil servants to serve citizens better and to be more responsive to their needs.
- In order to benefit fully from the availability of new ICT tools, governments need to undertake a simultaneous cultural change in their civil service, including exploiting the potential of home and tele-working to achieve equal opportunities and greater productivity.

- Decision-making can be strengthened through better sharing of information and more consultation, both within government and externally, with civil society.
- ICT will have an impact on the way parliaments function by opening up possibility of a wider debate with citizens.
- Transparency of government action must be enhanced by exploiting all the possibilities offered by ICTs which allow the monitoring of public activities, the reduction of corruption and the enhancement of citizens' trust and their ability to intervene.
- In developing countries, e-government can reduce economic and social gaps, but in such contexts a particularly strong public action is needed to guide the process, and avoid an exclusively "business approach".
- A priority problem is the development of infrastructures to allow access to ICT and education of the population.

Guaranteeing privacy and security

- E-government creates expectations and anxiety, which need to be actively managed by governments. Citizens will reject e-government unless protection of their personal data and the security of their transactions is guaranteed.
- Protecting citizens is a duty of governments: therefore, regulatory frameworks should enforce this protection and specific advanced technologies should be adopted so as to guarantee absolute privacy, security and safety to users.

Bridging the digital divide

- The digital divide within countries and between them is the result of the broader social and economic divide, which is not only widening but also becoming increasingly unbalanced. Thus, policies for bridging the digital divide cannot substitute for interventions in the basic fields of education and health care, but should complement and reinforce them, in a new holistic vision of development assistance.
- ICTs are not a goal *per se*, but can be a very powerful and a relatively cheap tool to help reduce and eliminate these other divides. If well managed ICT can effectively assist in the achievement of sustainable socio-economic development, by empowering individuals and societies and fostering institutional capacity building. Thus, projects for development should include ICT to the maximum possible extent.
- The huge potential for development that lies in the ICTs is not yet adequately reflected in development policies from donor countries and international organisations. Broader awareness in this field is necessary, also through high profile international initiatives like the Naples Global Forum.
- Infrastructure is only one part of the digital divide; multi-level human capacity building is no less important to extract the full potential value of ICT for development, and to manage information. ICT should be incorporated in general education and professional courses, as well as in specific initiatives for raising the awareness of government officials, teachers, doctors and business people in developing countries.
- The needs of developing countries as far as digital divide is concerned are quite diverse in each country or region. They should be addressed by having a clear picture of them, with initiatives supported by strong local political commitment, a sustainable agenda and a synergetic approach profiting from partnerships with national and international NGOs and

the private sector. Thus, National ICT readiness assessment and action plans are encouraged, as well as the creation of National ICT Council in which political leadership should be deeply engaged, in partnership with local and international NGOs, the private sector, the international institutions and the donor countries.

- E-government, as demonstrated by many significant examples during the Naples Global Forum, must be given serious consideration also in the developing countries not only for its potential for stronger institutional capacity building, for delivering better services to citizens and business (thus increasing local social and economic development), for reducing corruption by increasing transparency and social control, but also for "showing the way" to the civil and business society. Thus, the exchange of experiences and the sharing of best practices, also in a South-South co-operation framework, as occurred during the Naples Global Forum and the Naples seminars.
- The creation of a light but effective regulatory framework in the developing countries is vital for attracting investments and protecting ICT users. Developed countries and international organisations should provide advise and know-how to developing countries in the field of better regulation.
- Public-private partnership is considered a good avenue at both national and international level for harnessing the potentials of ICT for development. Thus, initiatives based on this new approach, such as the G8 dot.force and the UN ICT task force are encouraged.

Managing for success

- Strategies based on an overall vision and a clear timetable are an essential requirement for success.
- Strategies should not only be based on governments' requirements, but take into account the interests and needs of citizens, parliaments and civil society.
- Full and comprehensive assessment of risk is essential in managing large scale IT investments.
- Sharing experiences, building on best practice and learning from mistakes increases the prospects of success and diminishes the risk of failure. Adapting successful models speeds implementation and reduces costs.
- Citizens need to be educated about the potential of new technologies. Government has a role to play in achieving a cultural shift in improving society's use of new technologies, given proper legal and consumer protection.

Recommendations

The following actions and policy options are strongly encouraged by the participants to the Third Global Forum of Naples:

- Multiply occasions for international best practices sharing and mutual learning on e-government issues;

- E-government action plans must be built in partnership with private sector, consumers and non profit organisations, having specific consideration for equal opportunities and the principle of subsidiarity;

- Special consideration must be paid to the gender divide and equal opportunities when designing e-government initiatives;

- Attention must be paid to the needs of disabled and elderly people when building websites and projecting electronically delivered services;

- Citizens' privacy must be considered of paramount importance and broader use made of the existing technologies for protecting personal data and to avoid malpractice;

- Establish a *peer-to-peer e*-relationship between State and citizen, and between State and business, when a public service is delivered electronically, also in order to improve accountability, transparency and trust;

- Redesign and not merely adjust processes when introducing ICT in government;

- Extending the electronic delivery of public services to all the population, including the "Internet – illiterate" by means of, e.g., smart cards, Internet kiosks …

- Favour the creation of websites for comparing the best examples of e-government and portals to provide advice and training for e-government implementation for both developed and developing countries;

- Foster the setting up of international standards for technical requirements of digital documents;

- That the OECD, taking into account the findings of the Naples Global Forum, contribute through its future work programme to the deepening of understanding of the potential and implications of e-government and sharing the results as widely as possible. Moreover, OECD could study tools for a high quality regulatory framework in e-government related matters;

- That the G8 dot.force stresses, in its report, the importance of: ICT for development and for fighting poverty; need for specific ICT action plans for each country or group of countries; ICT policies' need for a strong political commitment and of partnership with private sector and NGOs; need for light but effective regulatory framework in order to attract investment and protect privacy of users; human capital enhancement, knowledge-sharing and South-South cooperation;

- Support for UN Secretary-General action for ICT for development initiatives (UN ICT task force) and underline the need for coordination with other international initiatives;

- Favouring common training initiatives for civil servants in ICTs for governments;

- Naples seminars for developing countries on e-government, based on peer sharing and practical education on ICT tools, are considered a good example to be replicated; appreciation is expressed on the announcement that these international seminars will be repeated on an annual basis in Italy;

- **Fostering regional poles for e-government training based on strong public, private and NGOs partnership;**

- **Fostering indigenous knowledge, local languages and preservation of local cultures by means of ICT.**